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ABSTRACT

A politicized, sophisticated citizenry split into several special interest factions is placing great demands on school board members just as they find themselves struggling with unprecedented organizational and financial difficulties. In order to meet these challenges, board members must respond to districtwide needs rather than represent special interests. They must also gain new managerial skills and develop a continuous flow of accurate information on which to base decisions. This new managerial approach can be modeled on recent trends in the operation of corporate boards of directors. This paper examines the pressures placed on corporate boards and how those boards have changed since they first became models for boards of education in the early twentieth century. The authors argue that today's pressures should prompt school boards to change in similar directions, away from representation of constituencies and toward responsiveness to environmental influences. Methods for encouraging development of a responsive board, partly through recruitment of suitable board candidates, are discussed. (Author/PGD)

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REPRESENTATIVE SCHOOL BOARDS: BEYOND THE MYTH AND INTO RESPONSIVE ROLES

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Representative School Boards: Beyond the Myth and into Responsive Roles

Traditionally, boards of education have been viewed as representative political bodies. Board members were elected to represent the general citizenry within the school district and were expected to be responsive to all constituencies within the community. Given a public belief in the "unitary community" which assumes undifferentiated sectors of citizen interest (Salisbury, 1965), representativeness was not a problem. However, as the myth of the unitary community became increasingly questionable, representation as defined in traditional democratic concepts became impossible (Mann, 1977). The heightening of vested interest group activity disallowed classic assumptions of representation even in the smallest and most seemingly homogeneous communities. At best, school board members could only hope to be responsive to varied demands rather than representative of all constituent needs and demands. Thus, a particular school board member would be responsive to a broader citizen constituency than the limited vested interest faction of the community he or she might directly represent.

Perspective on the Board

Within this responsive mode most of the basic functions of the school board appear to have remained essentially consistent with those delineated by Cubberly (1916) and Strayer (1938). "School boards should be small, elected not appointed; they should be removed from partisan politics; they should function as a committee of the whole; and they should serve as legislative bodies and turn over the executive function to the superintendent and staff; and should serve without pay." More recently, Genck and Klingenberg (1978) have specified the key responsibilities of a responsive school board

to be:

. establish purposes and goals

. balance educational costs and benefits

. develop staff talent

. monitor educational performance

Within this generic description of school board functions, board members are assuming varying decision roles. Recent studies (McCarty and Ramsey, 1971; Zeigler and Jennings, 1974) have described the role of the school board as a function of the political structure within its community. The size, complexity, and formalization of community networks determine to what degree the board member is responsive to constituent demands or operates "in trust" for the larger community.

Mann (1977) has delineated three major operational styles which are assumed by board members: trustee (following one's conscience in decision-making), delegate (considering the needs and desires of their constituencies in each decision), or politico (reacting to situational contingencies). The styles define a continuum of operational autonomy versus responsiveness within the overall governance structure. Only within the trustee role can the board member adopt a representative posture which assumes either virtual consituent unanimity on various issues or the abdication of complete decision-making authority by the constituents.

In Iannacone's view, board members assume a conflict-inducing three part role. The board member is simultaneously a member of a corporate body with fiduciary responsibilities, a representative of a constituency, and a member of a group (the school board) with personal responsibility for "group maintenance and locomotion" (Iannaccone, 1970). Again, the responsive posture is integral to a board member's ability to balance the potential conflict from role demands.

The fiduciary role of the board member acting as a trustee of the people has been a recurring theme since its conception at the beginning of this century (Cubberly, 1916). This notion of trusteeship is political in nature and stands in contrast to the executive and managerial duties ascribed by Cubberly and his colleagues to the superintendent. Dichotomizing these roles was a direct outgrowth of the call for increased professionalism in educational administration. However, as economic and social conditions changed over time, the preservation of this role differentiation has become increasingly impractical. By the early 1960's, it was recognized that the superintendent's duties had to be performed with both managerial skills and political savvy (Boyd, 1976). Likewise, in recent years, board members faced with demands for accountability, growing economic constraints, and increased personal liability, have recognized the need to assume greater involvement in school management decisions. The separation between the educational professional and the lay policy-making body no longer seems a policy option.

This paper will describe the effect of specific environmental factors upon school boards, thus establishing a rationale for the assumption of new board roles and functions. It will then suggest an adaptive strategy (Bateson, 1980; Aldrich, 1979), predicated on assumptions of responsiveness which would enable better school district management under current societal conditions.

Social Trends and the Board Role

The role of the school board is in great measure defined by the societal trends and public perspective of what boards should be. Therefore, a board must be viewed within the context of the larger society, particularly in light of today's more sophisticated, educated public. This section will trace those environmental factors and societal forces which have demanded changes in board composition and function, thus establishing a rationale for and a conceptual framework on which forthcoming recommendations will be based.

For many years public schools were seen as the panacea for society's problems and as the key to our nation's growth and success. Americans have traditionally depended on their public schools to maintain principles vital to national unity (Carlson, 1975). Throughout its history in this country, public education has been charged with, among other things, creating good citizens and intelligent voters (Coughlin, 1961). And, in the early part of this century, the goal of public education was to Americanize the great numbers of immigrants entering this country in order that they might be assimilated into the society (Gordon, 1979). By the second half of the century, this mission was broadened and many shared the belief that public schools were capable of curing social ills. The schools would offer youngsters an avenue out of poverty and despair. Effective education would end racism and would ensure equal opportunity for all. The responsibility of the board in these efforts was to assure that community values were reflected in the attainment of the educational goals of the district.

However, the acceptance of and commitment to this ideology of the public schools as the great equalizers and preservers of democracy changed with the closing of the sixties. Many became disillusioned with public education, and schools became the object of public criticism (Bailey, 1981). The first teachers' strike caused lesions in the community of educators. Desegregation legislation and activities, many of which resulted in racial unrest, further exaggerated the seeming powerlessness of the public schools. As the public became more educated and more politically astute, they became increasingly outspoken (Shanker, 1981). Many of these issues concerning public education were devisive, causing citizens to establish many factions and interest groups imposing their varied demands on the public schools. Prior to the 1960's, boards felt powerless in the face of the knowledge and expertise held by the

professional administrator, and many boards gratefully deferred their decision-making authority to the "educational experts." However, the increasing demands on education prompted many boards to begin to retrieve some of their authority as pressure for citizen accountability mounted from the outside.

Parallel to the aforementioned social and ideological changes affecting public education were economic and political factors which also presented a challenge to educational decision makers. Prior to 1970, the nation was experiencing a period of growth and expansion (Bakalis, 1981). There appeared to be an abundance of money available to support educational innovation. The post World War II population increases caused public education to expand dramatically. The national economic scene was also one of growth. Educational managers were not worried about securing funds for their operations and had more autonomy and discretion in their decision making (Biros, 1981). As the belief grew that public education was the answer to our nation's problems, the scope of educational services broadened, and the schools took on new responsibilities.

As schools accepted new responsibilities that extended beyond the scope of what had traditionally been considered the core mission of education (eg. desegregation, sex education, provisions for the handicapped, innovative curricula), boards of education were confronted by increasing pressure from conflicting citizen factions and were forced to become more active and aggressive in school governance and management.

The decline of resources experienced from the sixties also impinged directly on educational operations (Wiles, 1975). Many of the new programs undertaken by the public schools were seen as wasteful and irrelevant, bringing about even more challenges from the public (Bailey, 1981). Today, vested interests appear to be presenting more encompassing, serious challenges

to public education than those encountered during the 1960's and 1970's. There is a broad-based citizen questioning of public schooling as the most appropriate institutional means of educating our children. This challenge is levelled by an unlikely but effective coalition of radical religious organizations, taxpayer groups, disenchanted liberals, the elderly, and other well-to-do parents with children in private schools (Ellerin and Kesten, 1981). There are major revisions in federal funding patterns for public schools and ultimately the role (or lack thereof) of the federal government in education (Ayres, 1981).

These changes in federal funding and concurrent lack of citizen faith in public schools directly implicate boards of education in key educational decision-making. As both slogans and symbols of present changing attitudes about public schools, the concepts of "back to basics" and "return to local control" have mobilized present citizen forces against the current shape of education. In response to these pressures, as well as the posture of President Reagan, the Congress passed the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981. The block grants, which are the new allocative mechanism resulting from this legislation, send non-categorical monies through state education agencies to local school districts. This new method of distributing federal money is being done in the name of "increased local choice" (Koff and Trautwein, 1981). Decisions about how to spend the unearmarked money are to be made at the district level on the basis of local priorities, forcing critical changes in school board operations.

The difficulties for school districts to be responsive to local priorities in making these operational decisions are further compounded by the severe cuts in federal dollars targeted for education. Politically and educationally there will be multiple ramifications for school administrators and boards of education as each local district establishes and funds new educational priorities.

These new priorities and the "shortfalls" of funds are forcing schools to make difficult choices concerning the funding of programs as well as overall organizational scope and quality. Boards and administrators have been clamoring for this kind of decision-making autonomy but are, in actuality, often inexperienced and unprepared to make these decisions. Today's school board member can no longer afford to function purely as a representative of a specific group with vested interests. Likewise, board members and school administrators are no longer being allowed to make decisions in a vacuum. The heightened politicization and sophistication of the local citizenry in combination with such organizational trends as codetermination and participative management are "forcing the hand" of the school board.

Managerial elites and decision makers biased in favor of the vested interests of a narrow constituency will not have the resources to meet the legal and other challenges made in the name of district-wide interest. School boards, functioning as "boundary spanners" (Aldrich, 1979) are the natural pressure points for this political choice activity, as well as being legally liable. In order to meet these challenges and make prudent decisions, board members need to assume a responsive role to complement diverse managerial skills and the use of continuous, accurate information. The school board literature suggests that incumbent members are aware of these forthcoming challenges, but are not confident of their abilities to meet them.

Board members are not the only ones who lack this confidence. Citizen critics of public education often have identified poor management to be the root of many of the problems faced by public schools. In consequence, "as industry did many years ago, education is turning to a new management philosophy to deal with financial, public, and employee pressures." (Genck

Klingenberg, 1978). However, making better management "work" to address these critics and the problems in the schools demands more than a simple mimic of the private sector, especially of industrial models created for the 1960's or 1970's.

The Corporate Board and The School Board

While there are distinct differences between a business organized for profit and a non-profit public organization such as a public school, there are indeed similarities.

> One of the striking trends in the United States is the increasing amount of society's work being performed by organizations other than business firms... Business enterprises remain the dominant type of organization but other types of organizations gain in conspicuousness and in influence. Many of these organizations became enormous and require the same rarefied management skills as traditional business organizations.
>
> (Kotler and Levy, 1969)

Critics of business are suggesting that boards of directors respond not only to the interest of shareholders but to the public interest as well (Smith, 1978). Mueller (1981) suggests that the sharp distinction between the public sector and the private sector has become blurred and negative public opinion has shifted emphasis from the corporation as responsible to stockholders alone, to the corporation as responsible to all parties who have interest in or who are affected by corporate conduct. We emphasize the responsiveness message from business in the 1980's.

The realization of changed public demands on boards has come sooner to corporate boards than it has to public school boards. This paper is an attempt to apply what corporate boards have learned about responsiveness to public demands to the functions of school boards. Responsiveness is a sensitivity to externalities and a state of mind to be assumed by organizational policy makers. It is not just an empty philosophical appeal.

Educational organizations can borrow two major features from business: the basic organizational structure of the corporation and the state of mind including the recognition that the certainty of any given product is not ensured but must constantly be re-evaluated. An example of the recognition of the need for responsiveness and the uncertainty of products is evident in what has happened to the auto industry in Detroit. They have suffered severe setbacks resulting from the inability or unwillingness to respond to consumer demands and reassess the product.

From a review of corporate board literature (particularly Mueller, 1978; Erickson, 1976) the following emerge repeatedly as the predominant responsibilities of the corporate board:

1. Establish the validity and viability of the company's objectives,
2. Evaluate both management and the organization,
3. Participate with management in establishing financial plans and strategies,
4. Establish basic organizational policy,
5. Establish underlying well-being of corporation and monitor performance,
6. Relate corporate activities to social and environmental responsibilities, and
7. Function as an advisor to management.

In comparing these responsibilities to the responsibilities of the school board as defined by Genck and Klingenberg (1978) there are striking similarities. They specify board responsibilities to be as follows:

1. Establish liaison with the community,
2. Oversee educational facilities and financial planning,
3. Set purposes and objectives,
4. Establish policies,

5. Review performance,

6. Seek out and consider recommendations from management, and

7. Evaluate the district and the superintendent.

A comparison of the two lists suggests that board roles and functions are generically alike in both the public and private sector. The similarities support an eclectic application of those desirable or successful conventions employed by corporate boards to the activities of boards of education. This application of the corporate board model to educational boards is not a new notion. It was proposed by Cubberly in the early part of this century under representative assumptions (1916) and was re-examined by Tyack (1974) under assumptions of responsiveness. We conclude that education and school board functions have evolved over time as have the concepts of composition and workings of the corporate board.

A Model of the Corporate Board

The corporate board has changed from the relatively passive, comfortable club of privileged business professionals that assumed its citizen representation to a body of business managers actively involved in very serious, time-consuming work of being responsive (Smith, 1979). The post director's chairs have become hotseats subject to public criticism and personal liability making board positions not quite as attractive as they once were ("Why lawyers," 1976). In response, directors are being encouraged to recognize the personal costs of becoming a role incumbent as well as the corporate demands for broadly skilled persons (Mueller, 1974). Directors must be willing to expend enough time in their trustee positions to substantively participate in the management of the corporation. Because the temporal demands of responsiveness are so great on active and high quality directors, an extensive body of literature discusses the very need for full-time (versus part-time) board members. Essential

themes in the discussions are the time commitments, the objective perspective of an outside director, and the extensive company knowledge of an outside director. (See: Mueller, 1974; Mueller, 1981; "The powerful case," June 1976; Erickson, 1976.) furthermore, directors must be aware of the increasing legal liability of their position (Estes, 1980) as well as the "conflicts of interest, insider information, lawsuits, tax complications, exposure to public indignation, and harrassment (which) jeopardize the satisfaction of being a director." (Mueller, 1974). All this emphasizes the difficulty of being responsive in the 1980's.

Stressing the need to comply with growing environmental demands on board members as well as traditionally complex problems of operating a company, management literature strongly reaffirms the need for variously skilled directors on the board. "What is required, above all things, is a blend of successful experience in different fields, such as operational/financial, scientific/technological, marketing and personnel management." ("The powerful case," June 1976). "Each director's presence should be more than a token presence." (Erickson, 1976).

As directorships have become more demanding with greater pressures accompanying them and requiring greater involvement in corporate affairs, changes have taken place in the composition of the various corporate boards and the qualifications sought when recruiting prospective board members. Recent trends in the role to be assumed by directors calls for them to become a more involved and effective force in corporate management (Sherony, Stoeberl, Haimann, 1979). Most board members come to their positions after a long career in top management, thus possessing a broad business knowledge base. The trend recently has been toward "the design of

so-called "complementary" boards, where each director represents a different functional area--marketing, finance, research, and so on." (Duncan, 1977). While no one board member could be expected to possess all the requisite skills to deal with the dynamic and complex economic and legal factors inherent in corporate direction and citizen demand, the interaction of directors with varied and complementary skills affords the corporation greater assurance of organizational responsiveness, survival and success (Aldrich, 1979).

"Whereas, in the past, the CEO (Chief Executive Officer) was expected to take the lead in structuring organizational success, now the Board will become a more important top management group for seeing the corporation through difficult times ahead." (Sherony, Stoeberl, Haimann, 1979). The contemporary role of directors has evolved to a point requiring increased accurate information about the organization as well as a high degree of management competence in order to perform effectively. While acknowledging the impossibility of perfection, Mueller (1974) nonetheless feels comfortable about grouping ideal director skills into three categories: director know-how, management know-how, and personal know-how.

DIRECTOR KNOW-HOW

The ideal candidate for a business firm's board should have a reasonable amount of intellectual capital to offer in four areas:

1. A knowledge of the top management and director functions and practice,

2. Ability to communicate to others the knowledge and experience gained in prior career activities. A sense of history, intuitive insight, economic instinct, and social sensitivity,

3. Physical and mental capability and vigor, and

4. Intelligent service on some of the many common committees of boards of directors.

MANAGEMENT KNOW-HOW

1. Possess a forward-looking, mature philosophy of management; be able to develop ideas concerning business and management at the interface with the relevant environment,

2. Be able to sense changes, assess public opinion, analyze trends strategically, and evaluate them,

3. Be able to identify management problems, evaluate business and economic situations, and consider alternate problem solutions,

4. Have a proven reputation and prestige in top management circles, and

5. Possess a reasonable understanding of the skills and tools of some management disciplines (strategic planning, forecasting, organization, motivation, personnel relations, controlling).

PERSONAL KNOW-HOW

For a would-be director, several important personal characteristics rate high:

1. A code of personal ethics consistent with a high level of ethical conduct in the progressive, enlightened world of the business community,

2. A commitment to strive to increase personal competence, keep up with changes, and increase the prestige and dignity of the director function,

3. Use of personal talents, knowledge, and skill in some measure for the advancement of social or public welfare in areas other than his own business enterprise,

4. Possession and maintenance of a high degree of awareness of self-discipline in personal as well as corporate endeavors, and

5. Possession of the brain power, zest, personality, and sophistication to cope with the director assignment in a professional manner.

As Mueller's list of corporate responsibilities indicates, the board's predominant function is that of organizational policy-making. They are generally an all encompassing advisory body created to provide direction for the organization in its mission. Recent economic and social conditions are demanding that boards act with a greater degree of involvement in corporate affairs. Board members must possess a belief in the system and the institutions; a commitment to its methods and goals as well as to their own creativity and integrity; and the personal expertise to be an active and successful part of a management team.

While managerial skills are necessary for school board members, that is not to say they should be sought at the expense of other qualities and characteristics. In order to perform effectively as a school board member, one must possess a sincere commitment to the goals of the organization and must have a good understanding of the internal organization and its external environment in order to be responsive. Just as Mueller suggests that corporate board members "be able to sense changes, assess public opinion, analyze trends" so the school board member must be attuned to his environment. Managerial skills and competencies must work in harmony with environmental sensitivity and a sincere basic commitment to the goals of education to result in an effective school board member.

A School Board Strategy for the Eighties

As discussed earlier, the process of applying corporate board principles to educational boards is not a new concept. In suggesting this application of a business model to education, the earliest writers (Cubberly, 1916) were utilizing the then prevalent conception of corporate board organization in a

representative role context. At the time of such writing, separate companies were coalescing into hugh operating units with control centralized in a small board of trustees (Nearing, 1915). Educators of that era were attempting to grapple with standardizing educational practices to upgrade "quality" during the early years of the century. They were faced with vast numbers of virtually autonomous school boards making highly individual decisions (Tyack, 1974). If curriculum standardization and centralized control were to be the primary goals, then the corporate model of the early 1900's was an appropriate vehicle for educators.

Over the next fifty years, however, business and industry were forced to respond to their own increasingly ambiguous policy environment (Mueller, 1981), exemplified by problems in such areas as labor management, resource availability, rapid technological advances and changing environmental quality standards. The effects of operating in a "watershed" policy environment (Wiles, 1980) and being faced with increasingly variable local conditions, forced corporations to develop alternative governance strategies. "Contingency management" (Fiedler, 1972; Mueller, 1978; Johnston, 1977) became the new buzzword to discuss governance when applied to decentralized or "decomposed units" ("Executive anxiety," 1981; Aldrich, 1979) attempting to adapt to a dynamic economic environment. What became clear was that centralized control governance was a frequently dysfunctional but necessary adaptation for profit. Currently, corporations are emphasizing the benefits of decentralized management units ("Executive anxiety," 1981; Mueller, 1978; Wiles, 1981; Galbraith, 1977). Increased production, improved employee motivation, greater efficiency, and more frequent innovation have been the outcomes

of localized "profit-center management" (Mueller, 1974). This is the "corporate model" of the 80's and the managerial strategy which we are applying in this paper. It is a strategy grounded in a belief in the importance of interactions between the organization and its environment. Management is viewed as a less hierarchical process, relying on such mechanisms as community feedback, environmental monitoring and decentralized decision making. Boards of directors of such organizations are carefully selected to include persons with a wide variety of necessary skills and personal "know-how." The corporate director is aware of and responsive to both external and internal demands placed on the organization. ("Executive anxiety," 1981; Mueller, 1981). Clearly, education deserves no less than to learn from real life experience and not try to ape outdated centralized models from the 1940's.

Considering the evolution and developments which have stimulated drastic changes in the workings and composition of corporate boards, there is a need to re-examine and update the application of the corporate board model to school boards. Parallel changes in educational management call for this harsh re-examination as well. School budgets are reaching seven and eight figure proportions; educational plants and facilities are growing; labor negotiations are intensifying; and environmental constraints are mounting. Under these conditions the operational problems found by those directing the school districts are the same as those faced by those directing the corporations. However, the goals or objectives to be accomplished by school districts are fundamentally different. Unlike business, there is no profit available to act as a rationalistic cushion in the wake of citizen intransigence (eg: toward budget increases). School districts now have to argue their reason for being and the economics of fiscal mismanagement is only part of the problem.

By and large, community leaders tend to be prominent members of professions and business within the community. Those active in community affairs are generally members of the educated, upper middle class (Wildavsky, 1964). Global examinations of school boards across the country have indicated that members of the school board tend to be community leaders who are upper middle class, educated and part of a professional or business community (Underwood, 1980). This has been to the good fortune of the school districts, that the members they attract have been well-informed, skilled people. However, there has been no systematic assessment of the skills that are necessary for responsive board performance. This is not to suggest that there should be a list of such skills necessarily possessed by all board members, or that even a static list is possible. The requisite skills for successful board responsiveness are contingent upon the variables peculiar to the persons acting as members, the character of a particular school district, its community, and its particular policy situation (Bargen, 1970; Duncan, 1981). Nevertheless, an individual assessment by particular boards of what responsiveness skills and competencies mean and which are needed on the board is integral to the politically successful performance of a board in the 1980's and is a practical task to undertake.

In the business community, the Pullman Corporation has developed a four step model for systematic board member recruitment and overall board development.

1. Definition of Directorship Duties -- the identification and articulation of the functions and duties the board ought to perform in order for it to be effective in providing leadership, counsel, and stewardship to management.

2. Matrix Analysis of Board Composition -- an extensive analysis of the kinds of skills needed to perform the directorship duties, what skills were now contained within the board and what skill attrition would occur through retirement.

3. Definition of Administration Organization -- factors related to the favorable compensation of board members, efficient coordination of meetings and the provision of complete information reaching directors well prior to meetings in order that they may make well-informed decisions.

4. Directorship Selection and Recruiting -- refers to an information handbook which is used to inform a prospective candidate about the director's job.

(Mace, 1976)

Mace proposes that "corporate effectiveness has to begin with an explicit strategy for the composition, duties, and utilization of the board." (Mace, 1976). This could be a format to systematically self-analyze the responsiveness posture.

Cistone suggests that in selecting prospective members of school boards, voters deserve a clearer choice among candidates based on criteria other than personalities. Since board members are trustees of the people and are held responsible for the operation of school districts, it is not unreasonable to expect a board member to be able to define publicly why and how he/she possesses the skills required for responsible decision making. It is unfair to expect the board as a whole to function responsively when particular members may not be equipped with the ethical commitment or decision competencies necessary to assume the institutional responsibilities delegated

to them. This is not to say that boards should have total knowledge of the district, particularly in the realm of emerging educational decisions involving new vested interests. In addition, some educational decisions are within the preview of school professionals, and board members need to be confident enough to rely on the guidance and expertise of the "educational expert" (Cistone, 1975; Mann, 1976; Iannaccone, 1970). Nonetheless, no local board should fool itself about the fact that regardless of who makes many of the educationally sound and good managerial decis ons, the boards are ultimately held responsible for them (Genck and Klingenberg, 1978; Wiles, 1975).

Under the present "turbulent" circumstances, the optimum approach seems to be for the board and the professionals to function as a check and balance for one another in a management team style (Mueller, 1974; Cistone, 1972; Iannaccone, 1970). To effectively function in this role, however, board members must possess the interactive and management skills which would enable them to act as an integral part of the management team. Their collective expertise must be broad enough so as to limit the number of circumstances in which the board must function from a politically unsophisticated or inexperienced posture (Sharony, Stoeberl, Haimann, 1979; Mueller, 1980; Zeigler and Jennings, 1974; Bargen, 1970).

The strategy we've outlined is itself a process orientation focusing on encouraging the candidacy of individual board members who are concerned about being responsive. It offers a perspective from which to approach board functions in terms of decision realities, opposed to a static prescription of board success in the 1980's. It is rooted in an honest assessment process which relates board functions to the citizen demands for responsive public decision bodies, and it specifically serves the demands for political accountability faced by today's boards (Wise, 1979). The

proposed assessment process seeks to go beyond the list of good characteristics means of determining if the board is functioning adequately. It seeks to determine what skills, knowledge, or experience would enable the board to do a better job in coping with problems of responsiveness peculiar to a district. The recommendation inherent in this strategy is that board members relfect a broader range of skills and expertise keyed into the specific board functions of being responsive to the local citizenry.

In summary, the basic component of a strategy for school boards of the eighties could be as follows:

1. School districts should seek to recruit board candidates who possess technical qualifications and interpersonal skills which would enable them to function as active and integral members of a responsive management team. Such management skills would relate citizen responsiveness to the areas of financial planning, budgeting, developing organizational strategy, personnel, operations and labor relations, to name a few.

2. Boards should be composed of members reflecting a broad-based knowledge of such areas as management, finance, education or the community, to ensure greater ability to deal effectively with diverse problems and concerns. Assessments should first be made by the management team (board members and school professionals) to determine what personal competencies would contribute to a competent district board which is responsive to the citizenry. Missing competencies should be identified and board candidates who possess these competencies encouraged to run for election.

School board literature repeatedly reminds us of the political nature of the board. Granted it is an elected body rather than a selected body (Welch, 1982), which may attract self serving "politicians." However, that is not to say that many politicians cannot possess ethical concern for

citizen responsiveness and strong management skills, as well as political astuteness. In addition, the political nature of factionalism in the democratic selection process does not preclude vested interest groups as well as administrators and individual board members from taking an active role in recruiting and supporting specific candidates. They all may know persons who can be identified not only to be good politicians but also to be skilled managers who could bring to board functions the qualifications and experience identified to be necessary for truly responsive performance in a particular district.

Conclusion

As the role and function of education and the public attitudes toward public schools change in this new decade, boards of education are being forced to adapt to a new and often ambiguous environment. A starting point in this adaptive process is for boards to examine their citizen responsibilities and assess the existing member skills necessary to perform their duties well. The modern corporate model from industry and the concept of the board and school professionals interacting as a responsive management team suggest an alternative to popular current school board organization.

If public schools are to persist in presently recognizable forms, and if the whole democratic ideal of publicness is to continue to define reasonable educational decision-making, then boards of education must assume a leadership role in being responsive to the citizens of their community. School professionals are employees of school boards; however, it is the board which is the essential responsive element in school governance as it relates to the public. The "complementary board" of

public education (Dewey, 1946) would incorporate a systematically assembled diversity of responsive membership skills and guarantee the critical quality of commitment to pluralism in the 1980's. This commitment, which is at the heart of traditional democratic policy-making in this country, seems imperative to maintain a citizen perception of excellence in public school governance.

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